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ABSTRACT

This study examined the locus of control of experienced teachers with reference to their gender and academic background; and ascertained the relationships between locus of control and: (1) educational attitudes in general; (2) attitudes toward change; (3) sense of responsibility; and (4) classroom teaching behavior. Subjects were 80 secondary school teachers equally distributed in sex and academic qualifications. A description is given of the instruments used in measuring locus of control in each of the four areas. Tables display results in the categories of: (1) demographic variables; (2) intercorrelations between the four measures; and (3) mean comparisons between subjects scoring high on locus of control and low locus of control. The results are discussed and some possible lines for further research are suggested. Fifteen references are included. (JD)

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Teacher Locus of Control and Its Correlates Among Experienced Teachers

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Eighty secondary school teachers with different academic qualifications and teaching experience responded to the Teacher Locus of Control scale and measures of educational attitude, attitude towards change, sense of responsibility, and classroom teaching behaviours. Internality tends to go with masculinity, lower academic qualification, and longer years of experience. Correlations among the five measures largely confirm previous studies indicating the cross-cultural validity of the construct of teacher locus of control.

Originated from problems encountered in psychotherapy, the study of locus of control has a history of some thirty years though empirical studies in educational settings are more recent endeavours, especially those involving teachers as subjects.

Locus of control has been defined as the generalized expectancy of internal or external control of reinforcements. Internality refers to the perception of events, whether positive or negative, as resulting from one's own actions and hence potentially under personal control (Lefcourt, 1982: 35). In his state of the art monograph, Lefcourt (1982) cites studies carried out in real life situations and contrived laboratory experiments showing internality-externality to correlate predictively. Moreover, internality-externality seems to function as a moderator of stress in that control, whether perceived or actual, shows a consistent relationship with the way people wrestle with adversities in their lives; such evidence comes from studies of cardiac patients, medical students, marine corps trainees, and businessmen (who had just experienced a hurricane disaster).

In educational context, teacher locus of control has to do with the teachers' beliefs about their own ability to influence student performance and classroom events (Sadowski & Woodward, 1981). Internality-externality is in a sense the mirror image of deCharm's (1976) construct of origin-pawn and has also been referred to, where teachers are concerned, as teachers' perceived responsibility, "sense of efficacy, and perceptions of personal control (Guskey, 1982). However it is labelled, the central idea is the teacher's belief of self as the cause or source of student behaviours.

Teacher locus of control has been found to correlate as predicted with teacher behaviour and student perception: internal teachers tend to be more effective in instruction (Brophy, 1979), more democratic (Rose & Medway, 1981; Taylor et al., 1980) and more adaptive to new techniques (Berman et al., 1977). Moreover, students of internal teachers tend to see their classrooms as being more motivating or conducive to learning (deCharm, 1976; DeJi et al., 1981; Sadowski & Woodward, 1983). Nevertheless, as pointed out by Guskey (1982), most studies on teacher locus of control involved teachers with limited classroom experience under contrived situations, thus curtailing the generalizability of the otherwise impressive and interesting findings. In addition, the probable differences in internality-externality among teachers of different gender and academic background do not seem to have been explicitly investigated.

The present study was undertaken to examine the internalexternality of experienced teachers with reference to their gender and academic background as well as to ascertain the relationships between locus of control and educationally pertinent attitudes, that is, educational attitude in general, attitude towards change, sense of responsibility, and classroom teaching behaviours.

Subjects

The subjects were 80 secondary school teachers. There were equal distributions in sex and qualification (non-graduates and graduates), with 20 teachers in each of the four sex-qualification combination groups. Two thirds of the 80 teachers had three or more years of teaching experience, the others had less than three years.

Measures

Teacher Locus of Control (TLOC). This is a measure of teachers' beliefs in their own potential in influencing student performance and classroom events. A typical item of this 20-item Likert-type scale is: "I believe I can help each student in my classes to experience success and self worth in some area." The original authors (Taylor, Sadowski, & Peacher, 1981) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .732 based on the response of 103 elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Test-retest reliability of .575 was obtained for a sample of 34 teachers over a four-month period (Sadowski et al., 1981). With another sample of 78 teachers and a five-month interval, the test-retest reliability is .806 (Sadowski & Woodward, 1983).

The validity of the TLOC was supported by its relationships with student perception of origin climates in their classroom (deCharms, 1976) and with student grades. Further evidence of validity was procured by Sadowski & Woodward (1983) who by cross-lagged panel design established a moderate causal impact on student perception of classroom climates; teachers with internal orientation are more likely to engage in activities which enhance student motivation.

For the present study, it was necessary to change a few words in only two items to suit the Singapore context, thus leaving the original scale almost entirely intact. For the present sample, a Cronbach's alpha of .71 was obtained. This is obviously within the range of reliabilities reported by previous researchers.

Educational Attitude (EDATT). This 20-item Likert-type scale purports to measure progressivism in teachers' views on educational matters that are important in the school set-up. The scale deals with four specific areas of concern, namely, children, discipline, teaching methods, and school administration. Examples of items are: "Children grow and learn through making mistakes", "Punishing children makes them dull", "Pupils learn better when they are allowed to explore and discover for themselves", and "A principal who consults the teachers is more likely to be efficient". Higher scores on this scale denote a more democratic and child-oriented views. Reliabilities reported in previous studies (Lau & Soh, 1971; Soh, 1974; Soh, 1982) vary from .36 to .79. For the present sample, a Cronbach's alpha of .70 was obtained.

Attitude towards Change (CHNGE). This is a 20-item Likert-type scale constructed for the present study and meant to gauge teachers' perception of and receptiveness to change. A typical positively worded item is: "Life improves through constant change." And, a typical negatively worded item is: "There is nothing new under the sun." For the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha is .89, indicating a high degree of homogeneity of the scale.

Sense of Responsibility (RSPO). This 14-item Likert-type scale was also constructed for the present study and it purports to measure teachers' feelings towards being given responsibilities. A typical positively worded item is: "I accept responsibility because it gives me a chance to contribute". A typical negatively worded item is: "I feel bullied when asked to be responsible for something." For the present sample, Cronbach's alpha of .79 obtained.

Classroom Teaching Behaviours (CLTGB). This scale was constructed for the present study and it consists of 22 Likert-type items. In writing the items, an attempt was made to cover comprehensively various teaching behaviors commonly found in the classroom: dealing with students' answers, encouraging student response, explaining and correcting assignments, summarizing the lessons, providing opportunities for applications, catering to individual needs when setting homework, allowing freedom in seating and movement, etc. All items are phrased positively. Higher scores denotes a more child-oriented and democratic classroom. For the present sample, the alpha is .80, indicating a high degree of internal consistency.

Procedure

Subjects were approached for their co-operation to participate in the study². They were then given a set of the scales which they completed individually at their own convenience.

Results

Demographic Variables. Table 1 shows the results of mean comparisons made between the four sex-qualification combination groups. Neither the interaction nor the main effects are statistically significant, although non-graduates and males tend to score higher on TRLOC suggesting the possibility of their being more internal than their graduate and female counterparts.

Table 1. Mean comparisons on Teacher Locus of Control by sex and qualification

Source	d.f.	Mean squares	F ₀
Sex	1	234.61	3.53
Qualification	1	183.01	2.75
Interaction	1	10.51	.16
Error	76	66.44	

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		Non-graduates	Graduate
Male	Mean	77.85	75.55
	SD	7.67	8.02
	N	20	20
Female	Mean	75.15	71.40
	SD	9.14	6.47
	N	20	20

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Mean comparison on TRLOC was made separately by years of teaching experience. The difference between subjects with less-than-3-year experience (mean = 74.43, SD = 8.15) and those with 3-or-more-year experience (mean = 75.29, SD = 8.35) just misses the .05 level of significance ($t=1.91$, d.f. 78).

Intercorrelations. Table 2 presents the intercorrelations between the five measures. As expected, TRLOC correlates positively and significantly with EDATT, CHNGE, RSPON, and CLTGB. The common variances vary from 5% (TRLOC-CLTGB) to 10% (TRLOC-CHNGE). It is also interesting that EDATT, CHNGE, RSPON, and CLTGB correlate positively and significantly among themselves, with common variances from 8% (CHNGE-RSPON) to 12% (EDATT-CHNGE and CHNGE-CLTGB).

Table 2. Inter-correlations, means and standard deviations

Measure	Inter-correlation					Mean	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
1 TRLOC	---					75.0	8.34
2 EDATT	.28	---				79.4	7.31
3 CHNGE	.32	.29	---			67.2	10.83
4 RSPON	.31	.35	.28	---		50.7	6.24
5 CLTGB	.23	.34	.35	.29	---	79.0	9.60

All correlation coefficients significant,
 $p < .005$, one-tailed.

Measures:

TRLOC Teacher Locus of Control
EDATT Educational Attitude
CHNGE Attitude towards Change
RSPON Sense of Responsibility
CLTGB Classroom Teaching Behaviours

High versus Low TRLOC. Table 3 shows the results of mean comparisons made between subjects scoring high on the TRLOC and those scoring low on this measure. The first comparison on TRLOC merely confirms that the two groups have been successfully contrasted.

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Table 3. Mean comparisons between high and low Teacher Locus of Control Groups

Measure	Highs (N=40)		Low (N=40)		t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
TRLOC	81.6	4.76	68.4	5.10	12.04*
EDATT	81.2	6.99	77.7	7.10	2.22*
CHNGE	68.8	9.54	65.6	11.67	1.36
RESPON	52.2	5.83	49.3	6.20	2.10*
CLTGB	80.3	8.50	77.5	10.25	1.34

* p < .025, one-tailed.

Significant differences were found for EDATT and RESPON, with high TRLOC group scoring higher on these two measures. The differences in CHNGE and CLTGB, are in the expected direction, though not statistically significant.

Discussion

Pending further confirmation, the probable sex difference has its theoretical and practical implications, especially when considering the trend of female preponderance in the teaching profession³. Without sounding male chauvinistic, in view of ample research evidence showing the relationship between internality and academic achievement, the lower degree of internality of female teachers who are increasingly replacing male teachers may mean a decline in student performance in the long run. It has to be admitted that this seems to be a logical leap as the internality-achievement relationship has been found between student measures, especially for males. Whether a similar effect will be found between teacher locus of control and teacher gender in affecting student achievement remains to be studied.

Although the difference in internality between non-graduates and graduates is not statistically significant, it is however in the expected direction in that non-graduates tend to be more internal. This is consistent with what has been reported by Guskey (1982). Since the non-graduates teach mainly lower secondary classes where students are younger and their study less demanding, it is natural for the teachers to believe more strongly than do their graduate counterparts in own potential in influencing student performance and behaviour. The graduates' tendency of lower internality may reflect their realistic evaluation of the situation which is more resistant to change, since students are older and study more demanding. This however may also mean the graduates have a more fatalist view and hence under-estimating their potential influence and the students' educability. It would appear that a study of the antecedents of the lower internality of graduate teachers should prove informative and training programme as attempted by deCharm (1972) in creating origin classroom climate could be beneficial.

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The finding of no relationship between locus of control and years of teaching experience is also consistent with that reported by Guskey (1982), although the more experienced teachers in the present study tend to be slightly more internal. At whatever level a teacher teaches, experience affords the development of more effective teaching and coping skills and a better insight into what can and cannot be done with the students. It would then be logical to expect a positive relationship between internality and years of experience. Thus, the finding of no relationship in the present and previous studies is somewhat unexpected.

Three reasons may be hazarded to explain this finding. Firstly, internality is relatively stable and not easily modified by experience under normal teaching situations. Secondly, teaching situations are so varied and teachers have differential experiences, some positive and others negative, so much so that when teachers are considered as a group the changes in internality just cancel out. Thirdly, the relationship is curvilinear, with the novice and teachers of long service having lower internality. Admittedly, without further research, these are no better than speculations, though they seem plausible.

The positive relationships between teacher locus of control, on the one hand, and educational attitude, attitude towards change, sense of responsibility and self-report teaching behaviours, on the other hand, largely confirm what has been reported in the literature. This configuration of correlations shows rather clearly that internal teachers are more likely to hold educational attitude which can be characterized as more child-oriented, less disciplinarian, more flexible in instruction and less autocratic in administration; are more receptive and open-minded to change; have a stronger sense of responsibility; and, deal with students in a way that is more encouraging and allows more student autonomy.

In conclusion, although the measures of attitude toward change, sense of responsibility, and classroom teaching behaviours as used here calls for further refinement and validation, the present study has with a certain degree of success shown the cross-cultural validity of the construct of teacher locus of control. It has also pointed up some lines of further research which can be beneficially pursued.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Prof Cyril J Sadowski for providing me with the Teacher Locus of Control Scale and relevant reference materials.
2. Thanks are due my M Ed students (Mar - Jun 84) for their help in editing the items and assistance in data collection.
3. The male:female ratio of student population in the only teacher preparation institution in Singapore has changed from 1:1 in 1968 to 1:5 in 1981 (Soh, 1983). There is no signs to show that this trend will be reverted in the near future.

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